

"The Week's Bills"

DE VEAUX AT GAYETY TODAY

"THE MERCHANT OF VENICE" IS BELASCO'S FIRST GUN IN A BARDIAN BOMBARDMENT

By EARLE DORSEY.

NOW that Mr. Belasco and his Shakespearian cohorts have departed, and the tumult and the shouting of Venice sounds faintly in the distance, it is possible to approach more analytically the work that Belasco has given the theater in this the first Shakespearian work of his major producing career.

Viewing the production of "The Merchant of Venice" at the National during the past week, it seemed that here stood a fitting capstone to the career of both Belasco and his star, Warfield. The idea persisted that now would be a fitting moment for both to end their labors, to close their case, to let "The Merchant of Venice" stand to their credit through the years—to them a monument and a rebuke to those who sneer at the skill that has made emotionally vivid a play hitherto marked for its appeal to the intellect.

MR. BELASCO, however, has no such ideas in mind. He not only refuses to rest on his laurels but he declines to see, in his production of "The Merchant of Venice," anything more important than a test of public reaction to Shakespeare done in his personal manner. In short, Belasco announces himself merely started on a producing course that will include, at a date not remotely distant, a production of "Romeo and Juliet" with Lenore Ulric in the role of Juliet, as well as another drama by the Bard he did not designate by name.

This distinctly important statement was made by Mr. Belasco in the course of a chat at his hotel during the past week—a chat in which he expressed his opinion on many topics but in which he showed a great reluctance at first to discuss "The Merchant of Venice." He spoke, eventually, though, of his intention to do more Shakespearian plays with his present directorial and histrionic equipment and he also saidly opined that "The Merchant of Venice" was not apt to prove one of the big money-makers of his career, even though capacity attendance be its fortune.

Without actually saying so, Belasco intimated that a production of Shakespeare in the grand manner had long been his desire. It is a desire that has its roots in his early stage training, when a familiarity with Shakespeare was as necessary a part of an actor's stock in trade as is a familiarity with Joe Miller's joke-book today.

It is possible that the marked severity of dramatic material that has so badly handicapped this producer lately may have had a persuasive influence in hastening the realization of his desire and then too, Mr. Warfield, long credited with an ambition to play "Shylock," may have become highly importunate. At any rate, Belasco has plunged into Shakespeare with infinite zest and the first fruits of his handiwork, as evidenced in "The Merchant of Venice," are of major theatrical importance, as anyone who saw last week's production at the National will testify.

Of the many interesting observations made by Belasco in the interview I had with him, none was more illuminative than his

MURIEL DE FOREST
WITH
EDDIE CANTOR
POLI'S
TONIGHT

PEGGY
SHAW
IN
"MY FRIEND THE DEVIL"
METROPOLITAN

BYRON
GIRLS
AT THE
COSMOS
TOMORROW

LAURETTE
TAYLOR
IN
"PEG O' MY HEART"
COLUMBIA

PAT
O'MALLEY
AND

HELENE
CHADWICK
AT THE
RIALTO

ADRIAN,
FEATURING THE STRAND BILL TONY

THURSTON, THE MAGICIAN
AT GARRICK TONIGHT AND ALL WEEK

JOINT JEMIMA AT KEITH'S
TOMORROW

MARGARET LAWRENCE IN A NEW PLAY,
"SECRETS" AT NATIONAL TOMORROW.

THEATER GOERS' TASTE FOR CLASSICAL TO BE TESTED BY SHAKESPEARE REVIVAL

By ALAN DALE.

A SHAKESPEAREAN explosion threatens to burst. We are going to have so much Shakespeare that we shall end by believing that we are passionately fond of his plays and that we have a delightful classical taste. We are threatened with a virulent attack of Juliet, a doleful case of Shylock, and, for good measure, a few Hamlets. We have waited and waited for this.

Shakespeare, as a rule, comes in cycles. Ours not to reason why.

That it is a good thing for the theater is without doubt. Actors who can "read" Shakespeare are few and far between. Actresses who can be coquettish, impulsive, utterly feminine and charming as Shakespearian heroines, are the actresses who are worth while. They do say that nobody can play Juliet, who was fourteen, until she is forty, and they also assert that the present-day drawl and the present-day "repressed" method has incapacitated most actors from doing full justice to the Bard. Some of this is true. Some of it is rubbish. A good deal of it sounds much better than it is.

At the present moment we have John Barrymore playing Hamlet for better and for worse. It would be idle to pretend that people who care for Shakespeare are watching this Hamlet. They are watching Hamlet as Barrymore, rather than as Barrymore as Hamlet.

AND then Shylock. It is announced that the admirable actor closely associated with the saccharine sob stuff of "The Music Master" will realize this ambition and play the famous Jew. In addition, we are promised the magnificent settings that we are accustomed to see from David Belasco. We shall have wonderful effects and phenomenally beautiful mountings. It will be a feast for the eye. Frightful stuff can be written about Shylock, and usually is written.

The best Shylock I ever saw was that of Henry Irving, who had his own ideas and the courage to carry them out. Mr. Warfield, however, has an appeal to the theater-going public. Even Shylock cannot be so good. People will go to see him as Shylock who know nothing whatever about the character. They will pay the money to see "The Music Master's" star doing something new, with the scenic assist of Mr. Belasco.

They will read the long and possibly tiresome reviews with puzzled expressions. Sometimes one would think that these Shakespearian reviews were written by disgruntled actors—the sort who say "There are better Shylocks walking about Broadway without engagements." The sense of humor, as far as these performances are concerned, is never allowed to emerge. It is kept well in leash. Anybody who wastes frivolous or chaotic on the subject of Shakespearian actors is regarded as outside the pale—a good way outside. One has to be slightly mournful and reminiscent and philosophical and perhaps a trifle pessimistic about all new Shakespearian productions.

JACKIE
COOGAN
AT
CRANDALL'S